

The logo for the University of the Atlantic (UAC) is displayed in white text on a dark blue rectangular background. A green diagonal line runs from the bottom right corner of the rectangle towards the center.

UAC

Annual Report 2020–21



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Company overview

During the past year, the higher education sector has continued to face the ongoing social and financial challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response, UAC has maintained a steady path by focusing on its core centralised and bespoke admissions services. Demand for higher education has remained strong among domestic students, and UAC's position in the admissions space has proved robust.

We welcomed a new Chair to the UAC Board: Professor Denise Kirkpatrick, former Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Western Sydney University. We also welcomed Ms Cathy Kovacs as a non-executive director.

Many new colleagues joined us this year, further boosting UAC's collective capabilities. The Service Management Office was established, a service desk introduced, and the Business Analytics team was reconfigured to accommodate the growth in demand for research and data.

UAC lost a beloved staff member, Annemarie Moloney. In her memory, UAC made the 2020 Christmas donation to the Cure Brain Cancer Foundation. And, after more than 20 years of service to UAC, Ross Walsh retired in January 2021.

UAC implemented many programs to alleviate uncertainty for students affected by COVID-19 lockdowns. There was growth in early admissions using Year 11 results and new disadvantages were considered as part of the Educational Access Scheme (EAS). Both EAS and the Schools Recommendation Scheme received record numbers of applications.

UAC Connect continued to grow. In June 2020 the University of Sydney's Gadigal program portal was launched. In August 2020 the University of Wollongong's Western Civilisation portal was launched and the Australian Catholic University's early admissions portal, ACU Guarantee, opened. We welcomed the Australian College of Physical Education in both the centralised and

Connect environments and Charles Darwin University as a participant in centralised admissions.

With the movement of many people limited by the pandemic, new ways of working were developed. UAC's Marketing and Engagement team expanded its outreach online – a move that was extremely effective. Facebook and Instagram live events gained exceptional viewer numbers and a new online information platform, UAC Digital, was launched.

The ATAR calculation also went paperless for the first time.

We made significant research contributions to the sector and government. A report analysing the impact of senior secondary subject choices on success at university was published in April 2020 and a report commissioned by government on student disadvantage and students' success at university was submitted to the Australian Government in February 2021.

Our deepening relationship with government was evidenced in the awarding of a grant to build the National Credentials Platform in collaboration with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE).

We look forward to another year of engagement with students, education institutions and government as UAC plays its part in making participation in lifelong learning easier for all.



Corporate governance

UAC's corporate governance framework enables the company to meet expectations of transparency, probity, accountability and integrity. It includes a compliance register which is formally reviewed by departments on an annual basis. UAC's risk management framework focuses on risk identification, risk mitigation and the integration of risk management into business planning and operations.

The UAC Board is UAC's prime decision-making body. The Board determines UAC's strategies for operations and future development, and oversees risks, internal controls and regulatory activities.

The Board receives advice from:

- the executive team at UAC, which monitors the management and performance of UAC and provides advice on corporate and strategic issues as needed
- the Audit Committee, which provides independent assurance to the UAC Board on the adequacy of UAC's governance processes, financial reporting, risk management, control frameworks and external reporting obligations
- the Nomination and Remuneration Committee, which assists the UAC Board in discharging its responsibilities in relation to the selection, appointment, remuneration and performance evaluation of the Managing Director, UAC Board and Board committees
- the Business Development Committee, which assists the UAC Board in discharging its governance and fiduciary responsibilities in relation to the pursuit of business opportunities within the higher education sector.

UAC's external auditor is the Auditor-General of NSW. The Auditor-General provides an independent opinion on whether UAC's financial statements are true and fair and comply with applicable Australian Accounting Standards.

UAC Board 2020–21

Chair

Professor Denise Kirkpatrick

President, Nan Tien Institute (2021)

Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Western Sydney University (2020)

Appointed July 2020, Chair and Director

Professor Denise Kirkpatrick is a highly regarded academic and educational leader. She is President of the Nan Tien Institute, a private, not-for-profit, government-accredited higher education provider offering courses in the areas of Buddhist studies, health and wellbeing.

Professor Kirkpatrick was previously Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Western Sydney University from September 2019 to November 2020, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Academic) from January 2015.

Before this appointment, Professor Kirkpatrick was also Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) at the University of Adelaide. She holds a PhD and is recognised internationally for her scholarly contributions in the fields of technology-enhanced learning and quality assurance in higher education.

Professor Kirkpatrick has been at the forefront of developing strategies to enhance teaching and learning at many of Australia's leading universities, as well as Open University UK. She has led many major projects designed to invigorate academic programs and improve the student experience.

Members

Prof Grady Venville

Deputy Chair

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

Australian National University

Appointed January 2019

Mr Damien Israel

Chief Operating Officer

University of Wollongong

Appointed July 2011

Mr Scott Nichols

Director, Management Consulting

KPMG Australia

Appointed September 2014

Prof Tyrone Carlin

Vice-Chancellor and President

Southern Cross University

Appointed January 2017

Ms Nicole Grainger-Marsh

Chief Customer and Operating Officer

MTC Australia

Appointed January 2016

Ms Cathy Kovacs

Company Director and Board Adviser

Appointed July 2020

Mr Robert Chard

General Manager, Corporate and Enterprise

Konica Minolta

Appointed January 2017

Dr David Christie

Managing Director

Universities Admissions Centre

Appointed March 2015

Officer

Mr Michael Berg

Company Secretary

Appointed January 2018

Organisational structure



About UAC

UAC – the Universities Admissions Centre – was established in 1995 and is the largest tertiary admissions centre in Australia. Owned by universities in NSW and the ACT, our mission is to provide excellence in admissions services and promote equity of access to tertiary education. Central to that mission is our belief in the value of education and our commitment to providing opportunities in higher education for all members of our community. We are not-for-profit and driven by a strong culture of servicing the needs of our stakeholders.

Institutions for 2020-21

Participating

In the 2020–21 admissions period, UAC worked with 26 participating institutions, which together offered more than 2,200 courses. UAC's participating institutions were:

- Australian Catholic University
- Australian College of Applied Psychology
- Australian National University
- Charles Darwin University
- Charles Sturt University
- CQUniversity
- Griffith University
- International College of Management, Sydney
- La Trobe University
- Macleay College
- Macquarie University
- MIT Sydney
- National Art School
- SAE Creative Media Institute
- Sydney Institute of Business and Technology
- Southern Cross University
- Torrens University Australia
- University of Canberra
- University of New England
- University of Newcastle
- University of Sydney
- University of Technology Sydney
- University of Wollongong
- UNSW Sydney
- UNSW Canberra at ADFA
- Western Sydney University.

Apply direct

UAC publishes general information and course listings for other approved higher education providers. This information appears in the UAC Guide and on UAC's website, but applications to the courses are not processed or assessed by UAC. Applicants apply directly to these institutions.

In the 2020–21 admissions period, UAC worked with 11 apply direct institutions. These were:

- Academy of Information Technology
- Academy of Interactive Entertainment
- Academy of Music and Performing Arts
- Australian College of Physical Education
- Endeavour College of Natural Health
- Legal Profession Admission Board of NSW
- National Institute of Dramatic Art
- The University of Notre Dame Australia
- University of Tasmania – Sydney
- Wentworth Institute of Higher Education
- William Angliss Institute.

Management

UAC's major policies are determined by the UAC Board, which reports to the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee. The day-to-day activities of UAC are the responsibility of the Managing Director. UAC's management structure and relationships are set out on [page 6](#).



Corporate objectives

Strategic Plan 2019–2020

The UAC Strategic Plan 2019–2020 builds on over 30 years of developing and providing robust, innovative and flexible processes and systems to support admission into higher education. The outsourcing of admissions processes to UAC has been both efficient and expedient for universities, enabling them to focus upon their core capabilities of learning and teaching, research and external engagement. It has also been better for prospective students, especially Year 12s, providing them with an easy access point to thousands of course options.

In the last decade there has been a decline in the centralised admissions service as universities have taken more direct admissions. In that time UAC has evolved its bespoke solutions business to meet the needs of institutions and it now represents a third of applications processed.

The UAC Strategic Plan 2019–2021 seeks to build on that success to take UAC to the next stage of growth, provide new services, consolidate our core and continue to work with institutions to meet their needs.

Our mission

To be at the forefront of access to higher education.

Our vision

To be the pre-eminent provider of admission-related services to education institutions and their prospective students.

Our values

- Collaboration
- Fairness
- Innovation
- Integrity
- Passion

Our goals

1. Help school leavers access higher education.
2. Provide bespoke services for institutions.
3. Innovate to add value and efficiency.
4. Position UAC as the leader in admissions.
5. Diversify our business.

Services



Admissions

Undergraduate admissions

UAC administers undergraduate admissions for domestic and selected international applicants. This includes a centralised application and assessment process; management of the allocation process; and the provision of associated resources, information and services for applicants, potential applicants, other interested parties and the general public.

Postgraduate admissions

UAC administers postgraduate admissions for selected coursework courses for domestic applicants. This includes the provision of a centralised application and assessment process; management of the allocation process; and the provision of associated resources, information and services for applicants, potential applicants, other interested parties and the general public.

Australian Tertiary Admission Rank

UAC manages the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), including website release, distribution of ATAR Advice Notices, management of the ATAR Enquiry Centre and the provision of associated resources for students, teachers, parents and the general public.

Qualifications Assessment Service

UAC's online Qualifications Assessment Service (QAS) allows potential applicants to have their qualifications assessed before they apply for tertiary study.

Equity schemes

Educational Access Scheme

Most of UAC's participating institutions offer the Educational Access Scheme (EAS) to help students who have experienced long-term educational disadvantage gain admission to tertiary study.

UAC administers all EAS applications on behalf of institutions, including the provision of centralised applications and assessment, the distribution of eligibility letters and the provision of associated resources, information and services.

Equity Scholarships

Equity Scholarships help financially disadvantaged students with the costs associated with tertiary study. UAC administers Equity Scholarships for UAC applicants and current university students, including the provision of centralised applications and assessment, offer processes and the provision of associated publications, information and services.

Schools Recommendation Scheme

The Schools Recommendation Scheme (SRS) is one way institutions make early offers to current Australian Year 12 students who have applied for undergraduate admission through UAC. SRS applications are assessed centrally at UAC using criteria other than (or in addition to) the ATAR, including school recommendations and senior secondary studies.

UAC Connect

UAC Connect is a bespoke admissions solution that provides full coverage of the admissions process from application to offer generation. It involves the integration of three key systems currently servicing undergraduate, postgraduate and international admissions: online application, expert management functionality and data warehouse.

The ATAR

Each year more than 55,000 school leavers apply through UAC for admission to courses offered by universities in NSW and the ACT. For the majority of courses there are more applicants than places. Applicants must be ranked to allow selection to take place.

This ranking is determined by the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

The ATAR provides a measure of a student's overall academic achievement in relation to that of other students and helps universities rank applicants for selection into their courses. The ATAR is a rank, not a mark. It is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 and indicates a student's position relative to the same age cohort.

The ATAR is calculated solely for use by tertiary institutions, either on its own or in conjunction with other criteria.

Calculation of the ATAR is the responsibility of the Technical Committee on Scaling on behalf of the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee. The NSW Education Standards Authority provides the HSC data from which the ATARs are calculated. The Technical Committee on Scaling is responsible for translating policy decisions into processes, and for developing and maintaining programs that ensure the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the individual ATARs.

ATARs are distributed to students by UAC, which also handles enquiries from students through the ATAR Enquiry Centre and customer contact centre following the release of the results. UAC also holds ATAR information sessions and distributes information about the ATAR to schools during the year.

ATARs were released on Tuesday 15 December 2020 to 54,894 students. Following this, UAC provided support to thousands of students via the ATAR Enquiry Centre, the customer contact centre and social media. The Marketing and Engagement team also responded to enquiries from all major media outlets.

The median ATAR for 2020 was 70.15, slightly higher than in 2019. The median ATAR for females was 71.30 and the median ATAR for males was 68.70. More than 50% of students received an ATAR of 70.00 or above.

The Technical Committee on Scaling produces an annual report on the scaling of the NSW Higher School Certificate. These reports can be found on UAC's website at uac.edu.au/scalingreports.



Initiatives and developments

National Credentials Platform

UAC, in conjunction with Higher Ed Services (HES), won a tender to collaborate with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment to deliver a National Credentials Platform (NCP). The NCP will enable learners to compile and share their qualifications, knowledge and abilities to help them secure a job, seek a promotion, or undertake further study.

UAC centralised admissions

UAC centralised admissions welcomed two new participating institutions:

- Charles Darwin University
- Australian College of Physical Education.

UAC Connect

Several UAC Connect bespoke admissions portals were launched in 2020–21:

- the University of Sydney's Gadigal scholarship program portal
- the University of Wollongong's Western Civilisation application portal
- the Australian Catholic University's early offer portal, ACU Guarantee
- the Australian College of Physical Education's admissions portal.

UAC International Agent portal

UAC's International Agent portal was redeveloped to provide a more user-friendly system for agents assisting international students.

UAC Reach

UAC Reach once again achieved exceptional results for both UAC and its clients. The program achieved an exceptional 60 per cent growth in 2020–21, which demonstrated its value to our clients in targeting future students and prospective customers

ISO accreditation

As part of UAC's commitment to providing excellent service to its stakeholders, in December 2020, UAC gained accreditation for ISO (International Standards Organisation) 27001:201, an internationally accepted standard of information security practices.

This certification recognises that UAC uses best-practice protection and handling of all its data.

Data insights

In 2020–21, the Business Analytics teams followed up its report on the impact of senior secondary subject choices on success at university with the report *Data Analysis: Student Disadvantage and Success at University*, once again commissioned by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

UAC Digital

Always adapting our services to accommodate those who depend on us, UAC Community Engagement launched a new digital information channel, UAC Digital, offering information sessions and videos on all aspects of university admissions.

Department highlights: Business Analytics



The Business Analytics unit had a very productive year working remotely due to COVID-19 conditions.

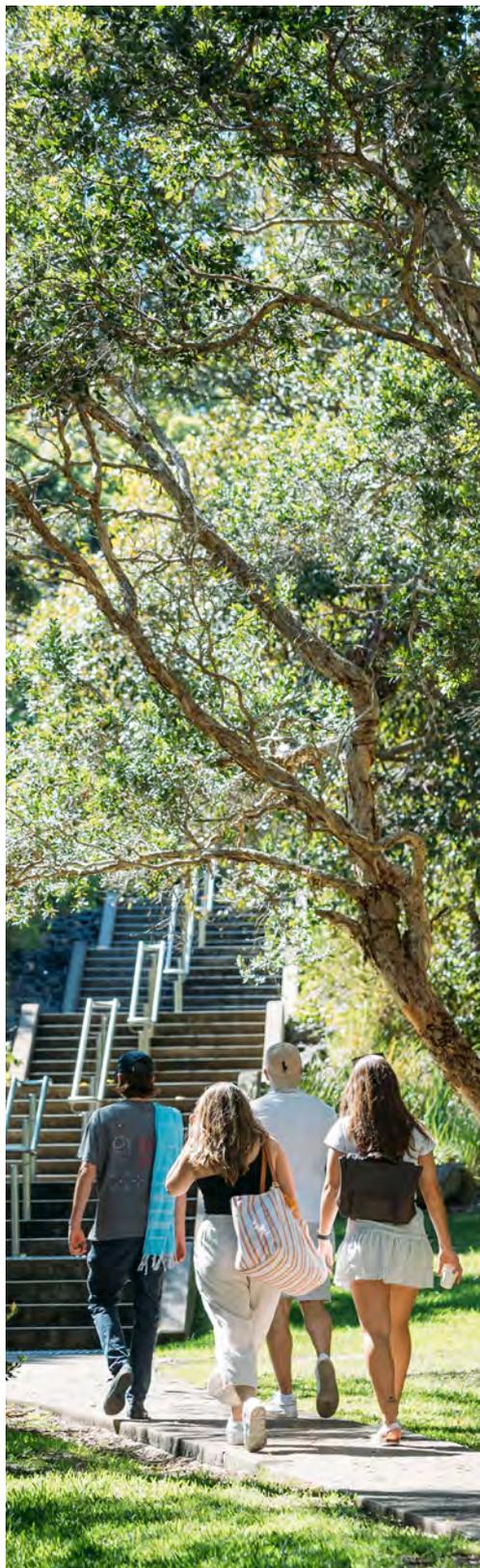
Major achievements this year included:

- The submission of a report examining the relationship between student disadvantage and success at university. Commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the report, *Data Analysis: Student Disadvantage and Success at University*, drew on UAC's analytical expertise and extensive access to data to examine how various forms of student disadvantage affect success in Year 12 and first-year university. Machine learning techniques were used to examine the complex relationship between disadvantage and other school- and subject-related characteristics.
- Given the threat of COVID-19 disruptions, the team made preparations to calculate the 2020 ATAR in a remote work environment, including making the whole ATAR calculation paperless.
- Data profiling for Reach campaigns was optimised using machine learning to develop an offer probability index. This will allow UAC to better match communications

between applicants and institutions, giving better outcomes for both groups.

- Insights dashboard development continued for both internal and external customers. Our first subscription customers can now access the full suite of dashboards with a greater range of data and deeper insights which complement the free dashboard available to all institutions.
- Bespoke business analysis using our ever-expanding data continued to be a popular request from institutions. Where appropriate, bespoke analysis was delivered using the UAC Insights dashboard.

Department highlights: Business Solutions



Through the expansion of existing business lines and the introduction of new strategic initiatives, the Business Solutions division advanced the significant growth of UAC's revenue, market share and products suite.

UAC Connect

UAC Connect, UAC's white-label admissions solution, enjoyed another year of outstanding growth. We welcomed the Australian College of Physical Education as a client.

Centralised admissions

UAC welcomed two new institutions as participants in its centralised admissions system. Charles Darwin University and the Australian College of Physical Education.

UAC Reach

UAC Reach has quickly settled in as a successful product for UAC. It grew exponentially in this period as institutions realised the value of our targeted campaigns to potential applicants.

Email marketing was the largest area of growth. We undertook 32 EDMs for 16 clients, resulting in annual growth of more than 60 per cent.

Department highlights: Information Technology



Dudley Collinson
Chief Information Officer

UAC's Information Technology department provides a range of technology-related services to our internal departments and the sector, including universities, private institutions, applicants, and state and federal government. These services include systems, applications, tools, core infrastructure, cloud services, project management, systems development, data reporting and analytics.

Support for new business lines

In 2020–21, IT continued with projects in support of the following new business lines:

- UAC Advance (credit management)
- UAC Credentials
- UAC International Agent portal.

New business for UAC Connect

Projects were undertaken for the UAC Connect business line. These included:

- further work on continuous ('rolling') admissions
- continuation of the project to upgrade system-generated correspondence into a system that enables these to be more easily managed
- further development of a comprehensive admissions, scholarship and accommodation application integrated with university systems

- development of two new portals for institution-specific early admissions schemes, and commencement on a third new portal.

Changes to centralised admissions

A project was initiated to review and update UAC documentation for the core wUAS (web-based Universities Admissions System) product.

Student assistance

During the year, IT support was provided for the following student assistance facilities:

- Subject Compass, a service provided on the UAC website to help Year 10 students choose their HSC subjects based on their interests and possible tertiary course choices
- Course Compass, a service provided on the UAC website to help Year 12 students choose an undergraduate course based on subjects being studied for their HSC and their expected ATAR
- Course Seeker, a website providing information on all undergraduate courses available in Australia. This was developed in conjunction with the other tertiary admission centres, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

Support of ongoing operations

IT continued to provide support for the business, including:

- changing the ATAR program to accommodate changes made to the NSW curriculum, and developing additional reports requested by the Technical Committee on Scaling
- maintaining IT systems and infrastructure
- facilitating opening and closing of applications, offer rounds, ATAR calculation and ATAR release.

IT infrastructure

The project to improve UAC's information security practices, which started in the 2019–20 financial year, reached a significant milestone in December 2020. UAC's IT environment gained accreditation for ISO/IEC 27001:2013 Information technology – Security techniques – Information security management systems – Requirements.

Planning and procurement commenced for the relocation of UAC's primary data centre from the office at Sydney Olympic Park to Macquarie Telecom's IC1 Data Centre in the Sydney CBD.

Planning and procurement commenced for the upgrade of the data storage modules at both the primary and secondary data centres. The current modules are reaching end of life and are ready for replacement.

Service management

A decision was made, and initial actions taken, to establish a Service Management Office (SMO). The purpose of the SMO is to improve UAC's service management capabilities and, in turn, enhance the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of UAC services to its customers. This will be achieved by developing practices in line with the ITIL best practices framework for IT Service Management.

The initial actions taken involved introducing improved IT change management practices and commencing the implementation of a service desk for institutions to lodge service requests, requests for change and incidents.

Business continuity and disaster recovery

Since late March 2020 and the start of the COVID-19 lockdown period, all UAC staff have been successfully working from home. This was possible because of preparations previously carried out in UAC's business continuity planning. This included:

- enhancing the VPN capabilities to enable all employees to work from home
- rolling out Microsoft Teams to all staff
- procuring additional laptops and monitors for staff to work from home.

Main admissions period

The months of December and January are the busiest times of the year for core IT systems. Several systems reach peak load in accommodating large volumes of public access.

Key dates and volumes included:

- ATARs released on 18 December 2020: between 9am and 11.59pm, 54,589 students retrieved their ATAR via the web and 1,323 via the mobile application. There were 18,649 subsequent changes to course preferences.
- December Round 2 offers released on 23 December 2020: 12,723 applicants logged on to retrieve their offers and full offer details were emailed to each applicant.
- January Round 1 offers released on 8 January 2021: 6,498 applicants logged on to retrieve their offers and full offer details were emailed to each applicant.

Department highlights: Marketing and Engagement

In 2020–21, the Marketing and Engagement team focused on providing advice, support and reassurance to applicants throughout their path from school to higher education in what was a difficult year disrupted by COVID-19.

Marketing

Student Lifestyle Report

UAC launched the inaugural Student Lifestyle Report in 2021. We surveyed over 7,500 Year 12 students and gained insights about their hopes, dreams, habits and leisure activities.

This information will be used to improve our services and provide new and innovative products.

Campaigns

In 2020–21, the Marketing team worked on generating traffic to the UAC website through paid search, and on growth and engagement on our social media channels. Campaign messaging centred around promoting the application process, early bird closing and offer acceptance.

The team also worked closely with the Community Engagement team to launch the UAC Digital webinar series with a comprehensive campaign strategy.

Communications

Email updates and reminders

The Update for Students email is UAC's main tool for communicating directly with our NSW Year 12 applicants. Throughout 2019-20 it was effective in keeping them informed of important deadlines and reassuring them that, despite the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent delays in the



Kim Paino
General Manager

release of Year 12 results, no student would be disadvantaged in relation to university entry.

During this admissions year, Marketing continued to expand its well-received UAC Parent Update email series. Sent monthly, the emails kept parents and carers of Year 12 students informed of changes throughout the year.

The success of this program led to the creation of a dedicated parent and carers hub on UAC's website, bringing together resources to help support students in their final years of school.

Newsletters

UAC publishes two periodical newsletters to advise subscribers of important information about admissions, upcoming events, key dates and scholarships:

- *UAC News*, a quarterly e-newsletter for principals, teachers and careers advisers with news from UAC's participating institutions
- *Directions*, a regular e-newsletter for all current applicants, prospective students, careers advisers, institution staff and international student agents.

To enhance our communication channels with our partner institutions, UAC introduced a new newsletter to its stable

– *Update from UAC* – to keep our stakeholders informed of internal updates such as system changes, project progress and new initiatives.

Engagement

Community Engagement

Community Engagement continued to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions to maintain engagement with potential applicants, parents, careers advisers, teachers and universities. The team formalised its online presence by launching UAC Digital – an online events platform delivering information sessions on all aspects of university admissions.

Throughout the year the team hosted free webinars for careers advisers, parents and anyone navigating their path to higher education. These ranged from an admissions forum for careers advisers and a conference for Year 12 students to our Let's Chat series – a range of interviews with academics and student recruiters on different study areas such as medicine, teaching and engineering.

The team attended 197 schools, 52 expos, 53 university events, and 28 careers adviser network meetings either face-to-face or virtually, with a total of 330 engagements for the year – an increase of 10 from the previous year. With a new series of webinars being created for the year ahead, engagements will continue to increase.

During the 2020–21 admissions period, Community Engagementsentover12,000emailstocareersadvisers across the country, received over 7,000 email enquiries, addressed over 1,000 Instagram direct messages and answered thousands of phone calls helping university staff, careers advisers, students and parents with vital information about entry into uni and the ATAR.

Customer Service

The Customer Service team operates UAC's contact centre. The centre is open from Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.30pm and handles telephone, email, LiveChat and Facebook enquiries. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Customer Service team continued to operate from home during 2020–21 admissions.

This year the Customer Service team took 52,829 telephone calls, received 24,773 emails, responded to 756 enquiries via Facebook Messenger and handled 692 live chats with visitors on UAC's website.

Following ATAR release, UAC's pop-up ATAR Enquiry Centre received more than 900 calls over five days.

Media

Speculation and anxiety over the effect of COVID-19 and the lockdown on students and higher education led to a busy year for UAC media.

As part of its media engagement, UAC sends regular media releases to a targeted group of media contacts, peaking around the key admissions period of December when the ATAR is released and university offers of admission are sent.

This year our media program extended to include disseminating information regarding changes as a result of COVID-19.

In July we received coverage in *The Australian* on the new Educational Access Scheme disadvantages announced in response to COVID-19. The record growth in early offer programs received extensive coverage and the announcement of our collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment to deliver a National Credentials Platform (in conjunction with HES) received strong coverage in September.

The media team also works closely with the Data Analytics team to publish statistics and commentary at significant points in the application cycle, such as the breakdown of semester 1 applicant and offer numbers.

Social media

In 2020–21, the social media team focused on hosting numerous Facebook and Instagram Live events to enable us to respond instantly to viewer questions and concerns. Topics included the ATAR, scaling, offers, pathways, equity schemes, and changes resulting from the pandemic. Thousands of prospective students, parents, careers advisers and teachers participated in these live events, with the videos being viewed 237,130 times.

We now have more than 21,980 Facebook followers and our posts reached a total of 3.3 million people, 577 per cent more than last year. On Instagram, we have a niche but extremely engaged audience of close to 4,080 students who look to UAC as a valuable source of information. Our posts reached 855,000 people, the majority being Year 12 students.

Website

UAC's website is the main information source and application facility for undergraduate, postgraduate and international courses at UAC's participating institutions. With over 1.5 million unique visitors each year, it provides the organisation with extensive exposure across the country and internationally.

Efforts to enhance the UAC website continued during 2020–21. Key improvements included:

- ongoing work to improve accessibility
- redesign of course descriptions to improve navigation and user experience
- implementation of a key dates filter
- creation of a new area in the Media Centre to publish and promote UAC submissions and reports.

The Marketing team continues to develop and fine-tune content to provide users with accurate and accessible information on higher education options.



Department highlights: Operations



Nerida Bewick
General Manager

Operations is UAC's largest division, comprising three units: Centralised Services, UAC Connect and Operations Services. It is responsible for a range of functions, including maintaining course-related information for UAC's institutions, and assessment of applications for admission, Equity Scholarships and the Educational Access Scheme. Operations manages data for all three of UAC's centralised environments – undergraduate, international and postgraduate – as well as for all Connect clients.

Centralised Services

The Centralised Services team has two units – Assessment and Access – which assess UAC undergraduate, international and postgraduate applications.

When an applicant applies for study through UAC, their qualifications are assessed as part of UAC's standard processing service to our institutions.

While selection of Year 12 applicants for tertiary study is usually ATAR-based and assessment is straightforward, non-Year 12s (those who have not completed their Year 12 qualification in the current school year) may be assessed on,

for example, professional qualifications, work experience or previous tertiary study. Applicants with international qualifications are assessed using schedules developed by benchmarking each country's secondary qualification standards against the NSW Higher School Certificate and ATAR.

UAC also assesses specific eligibility criteria; for example, whether an applicant meets course prerequisites or English language proficiency requirements.

To ensure UAC's assessments are fair and equitable for all applicants, staff stay abreast of educational reforms in Australia and around the world.

Figures reported in the following undergraduate, international, postgraduate and Access sections relate to the 2021–21 admissions period, not the financial year.

Assessment

Undergraduate

The 2021–21 undergraduate admissions year opened on 1 April 2020 and closed on 5 February 2021.

In 2020–21, UAC received 81,619 applications for undergraduate admission. Compared to the same period in the previous admissions year, there was an increase of 5,304 applications (6.9 per cent).

The increase in applications resulted in an increase in offers, with over 10,715 more offers made compared to the previous year.

Postgraduate

The 2020–21 postgraduate admissions year opened on 2 September 2020 and closed on 26 August 2021. During this period, UAC received 7,748 applications for

postgraduate admission and made 8,619 offers. This was an increase of 1,707 applications (24.7 per cent).

Other assessment services

UAC offers a Qualifications Assessment Service (QAS) for applicants who need to have their qualifications assessed external to UAC's application processes.

In 2020–21, UAC provided 2,724 Qualification Assessment Statements to QAS applicants, of which a significant proportion were applying to the University of Sydney's Graduate Medicine and Dentistry courses.

Access

On behalf of participating institutions, UAC's Access unit manages the Educational Access Scheme, Equity Scholarships and the Schools Recommendation Scheme. These programs address access to, and participation in, tertiary study, particularly by disadvantaged students.

Educational Access Scheme

To be eligible for Educational Access Scheme (EAS) consideration, a student's educational performance must have been seriously affected, normally for a period of at least six months during years 11 and 12 or equivalent, due to circumstances beyond their control or choosing.

In 2020–21, UAC received 28,251 EAS applications, more than 2,000 more than the previous year. Of these applications, 17,580 were submitted by students (an increase of nearly 4,000) and 10,671 were automatically generated using geocoding and schools' regional locations. Geocoding identifies applicants whose residential address is classified by Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas data as being in the bottom socio-economic quartile.

Equity Scholarships

Equity Scholarships processed by UAC on behalf of our participating institutions comprise:

- Indigenous Commonwealth Scholarships funded by the Australian Government
- Institution Equity Scholarships funded by individual universities, donations or sponsorship.

UAC processes Equity Scholarships for:

- applicants applying via UAC

- applicants applying via QTAC, VTAC and directly to the institution
- currently enrolled students.

During 2020–21, UAC received 7,736 Equity Scholarships applications, a decrease of over 1,400 applications from the previous year.

Schools Recommendation Scheme

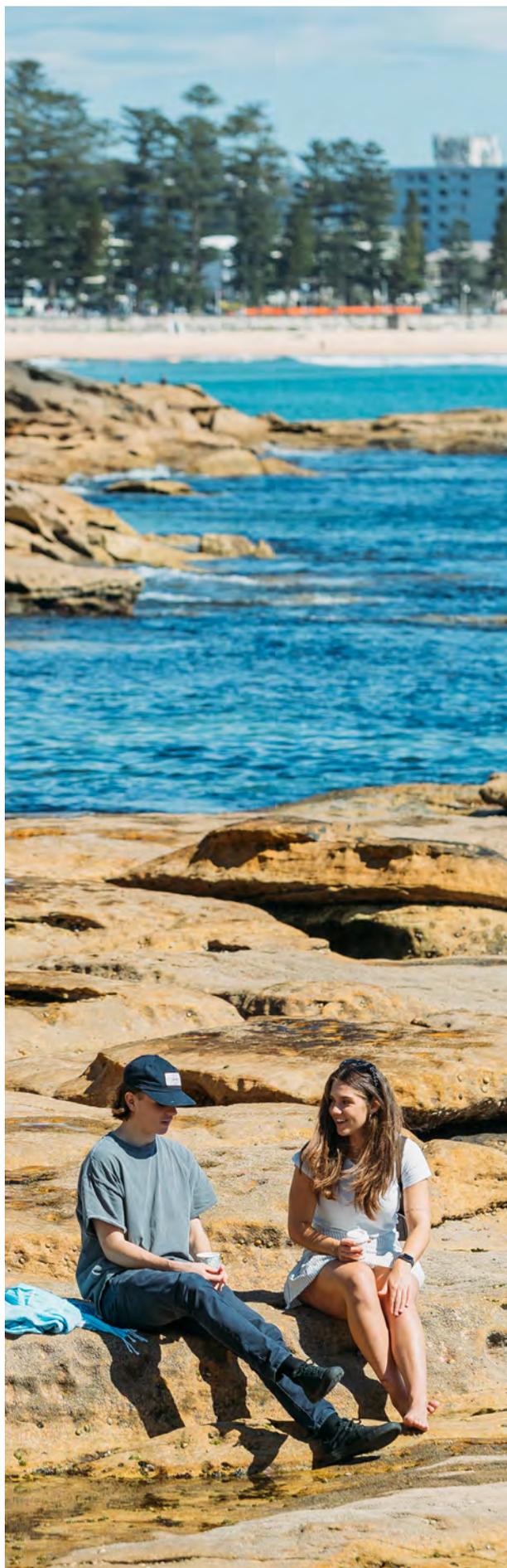
For 2020–21 admissions, Schools Recommendation Scheme (SRS) applications opened on 1 April 2020 and closed at midnight on 20 September 2020.

A total of 23,754 SRS applications were received; an increase of 44 per cent from the previous year.

Of all SRS applicants, 22,283 were from NSW, 921 from the ACT, 234 from International Baccalaureate schools, 188 from Victoria and 128 from all other states.

Gadigal

UAC supported the University of Sydney's Gadigal Program (Indigenous student admissions pathway) by assessing approximately 100 proof of Indigenous status documents. These are required to prove eligibility for the program.



UAC Connect

The UAC Connect team assesses applications that are bespoke for individual institutions.

During the 2020–21 admissions year (April 2020 to March 2021), the Connect team processed just over 103,000 applications for the following institutions:

- Australian Catholic University
- Australian National University
- Admissions, Scholarships and Accommodation Scheme
- International Scheme for Student Planning and Selection Framework
- CQUniversity
- Charles Sturt University
- Macquarie University
- University of Newcastle
- University of New England
- University of Wollongong
- Early Entry Scheme
- Western Civilisation Scheme
- Western Sydney University.

The services provided included assessment of domestic and international undergraduate and postgraduate courses, scholarships and early admission schemes.

Operations Services

Operations Services consists of two units: Course Profiles and Systems.

Course Profiles

The Course Profiles team is responsible for ensuring that an institution's course details and associated business rules are accurately reflected in UAC's systems across both the Centralised and Connect units. They liaise with UAC's participating institutions to collect and maintain course-related information.

Systems

The Systems team has responsibility for driving and coordinating system and process change across the major units of the Operations department. They act as a link between the Operations department, the IT department and other UAC business units and play a collaborative role in providing input into change specifications, implementation and testing processes.

Department highlights: People and Finance

People and Culture

The People and Culture unit provides advice and guidance to the organisation on recruitment, engagement, training and development, industrial relations and compliance, and payroll activities.

During 2020–21 UAC staff numbers rose by 4 per cent to 105 permanent employees and 66 fixed-term temporary and casual staff.

Recruitment activities remained a priority throughout the year with significant projects requiring additional resources. Due to external factors such as COVID-19, sourcing talent – especially in the IT space – has been one of UAC's biggest challenges. To maximise opportunities, UAC partnered with various recruitment specialist agencies to expand our talent capabilities.

COVID-19 changed the way team members worked, with remote work arrangements beginning in March 2020. Continuous improvement around onboarding and induction remained a focus to ensure the best virtual UAC experience.

Mental wellbeing and the wellness of team members has continued to be a significant focus, especially with staff working remotely in the COVID-19 environment. While feedback from team members indicated that working from home was proving to be successful, programs delivered by the Black Dog institute and UAC's employee assistance program provider, LifeWorks, were welcomed and maintained high engagement. Important priorities have included creating greater connection and awareness of the support available during isolation, including wellbeing sessions such as yoga and meditation.



Tim Gleeson
General Manager

Enterprise bargaining for a new enterprise agreement recommenced in March 2021, following an agreement to pause negotiations due to the initial disruption of COVID-19. UAC's intention was to maintain working conditions and embed flexibility into the agreement. Given external factors, flexibility is core to UAC retaining and attracting talent, along with the ability to respond to the changing environment.

In strengthening team engagement and connection with UAC's values and mission, strategy workshops were held with all staff to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The outcome of these workshops proved successful with team members providing input into the development of UAC's Strategic Plan 2021-2024.

As UAC continues to grow and build on its success, we will invest in deepening the connection with our team members to improve engagement, enable achievement of personal and professional goals and embed a culture of wellbeing and happiness.

Finance

Finance undertakes the financial resourcing, risk management and governance support responsibilities for UAC. We ensure UAC meets its financial, corporate, statutory, governance and risk management requirements.

These include providing fiscal and statutory reporting, financial budgeting and audit, management of purchasing and procurement, compliance with legislative and governance requirements, oversight of building maintenance, assessment of risk, insurance and legal matters, and policy development for the organisation. The unit also provides key information to the UAC Board and its sub-committees.

During the year we successfully completed the financial year-end and audit remotely. Using electronic and digital review techniques, our staff were able to provide all necessary supporting documentation, which showed that our finances were in good shape and controls were operating effectively. The result was a clean bill of health from the external audit team.

We also reduced our costs by renegotiating and downsizing our printer leases, which not only provided cost reductions for the future but also reduced our environmental footprint.

Management reporting is always a key focus for the team through the supply of information to the Executive, Board, and Audit and Risk Committee. We continually strive to improve the presentation and understanding of data across the organisation. This allows key decision-makers to gain valuable insights around business metrics and performance, to align effort with corporate strategic aims, and to identify opportunities for growth.





About this publication

The *UAC Annual Report 2020–21* gives an overview of the operations of the Universities Admissions Centre (UAC) during the 2020–21 admissions year and includes department highlights.

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